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ABSTRACT

This paper presents some impressions gained after 4 weeks of intensive discussion with about 130 graduating seniors on 5 college campuses in major Midwestern and Eastern urban centers. The student who is totally committed to the American Dream is increasingly rare. Students have realized that the end is here and now, the future and the present are one, and that life is in the living. Students have a real fear concerning the Bomb, the hot-line and America's preoccupation with "honorable" victory, regardless of cost. The draft is another cause of students' orientation to the present, and an increasing number of young men are staying in college to avoid the draft, or are risking imprisonment for resisting the draft. College students reject the materialistic, affluent way of life of their parents, they are increasingly committed to living just for today. Students engage much more openly in sexual relationships, and are increasingly more willing to risk jail sentences and criminal records. Many students lack plans after graduation and reject the status and prestige sought by their parents. Students are almost unanimously concerned about the ecological problems facing society.
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Special Issue, 1970

A RESEARCH REPORTER EXTRA

With this special issue, The Research Reporter departs momentarily from its customary mission of reporting Center research. Because the events of last spring had such widespread significance for colleges across the nation, Center staff members, accustomed to communicating in research language, wished to express their thoughts about higher education in more personal ways. This special issue, arriving on your desks at the beginning of a new school year, presents a variety of messages via data, interpretation, impressions, pictures, word feelings, and symbolism.

The Center has occasionally been accused of sitting in an ivory tower, viewing the turmoil of higher education from the safety of our research. After Cambodia, however, the Center along with countless colleges and universities became the scene of numerous high-tension meetings as faculty-researchers, student research-assistants, secretarial and support staff debated the now-familiar questions of priorities.

In the weeks following Cambodia and Kent and Jackson State, we too experienced the clash of differing perspectives formed by the diversity of our backgrounds and experiences. At the Center are staff who have served as college faculty, presidents, academic and personnel deans, institutional and discipline-oriented researchers, and in positions of state and regional leadership. We boast an age range of from 20 to 70, and we have the typical sprinkling of blacks, Chicanos, and women. Our Center is, in many ways, a microcosm of today's college campus.

As have our colleagues in colleges across the nation, we sought ways to express our convictions about the directions of society and, in particular, the role of education in restoring health and vitality to a troubled world. Significantly, most of those who sought the use of the pages of The Research Reporter to convey their message to this audience of educators are young junior staff members.

K.P.C.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

KATHLEEN ALLISON

Recently I traveled to five college campuses in major Midwestern and Eastern urban centers to conduct intensive student interviews. About 130 graduating seniors participated, sharing their ideas, opinions and feelings with me. What follows is a synthesis of these statements on the current social and political scene.

The urgent atmosphere that permeates our campuses is contributed to by the fact that these students are asking, and some are answering, vital questions about themselves. Their intensity left me both exhilarated and deflated. I sensed that today's college generation suffers from a kind of manic-depression, not in a strictly psychological sense but in a looser cosmic sense, much like that described by Jimi Hendrix in one of his songs.

In the years that these college seniors have been in

school they have experienced the murders of Malcolm X, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, the illusory hope of Eugene McCarthy's campaign and his promise to end the war, the tragedy of Chicago, the undoing of Lyndon Johnson, and the election of Richard Nixon. In these years there has been a steady disenfranchisement and alienation of students from the institutions and values in which they are expected to participate and support when they gain the maturity that is presumed concomitant with the baccalaureate. Many of those most deeply affected by these events have withdrawn from the institutions completely—they have dropped out. Others have compromised—they criticize the system but are afraid to reject it totally. Some take what they can from wherever they can and give back nothing but their presence on the

streets and the campuses; much to the annoyance of those within the "system" who would ask of them their souls, their youth, and their free spirit, and who would return nothing but promises for the future. The longer a student goes to school the further he recedes from the American Dream and the more he finds himself in agreement with his disillusioned fellows. These conditions have been central to the changes taking place in the ethics and life styles of American youth.

The question of the future is the key to Pandora's Box containing all the feelings, fears, hopes, and more fundamentally the frustrations comprising the consciousness of youth. Rather than use the catch-all "generation gap" to characterize change among youth, I want to point out that the differences between students and the older generation are both the cause and the effect of this change.

Increasingly rare is the student who is totally committed to the American Dream, to the implicit and explicit values of our institutions, and to our established system of living. The American ethic—work hard now to realize happiness, profits, and comfort at a future time—turns today's students off. They ask, what good is hard work if you're too tired, nervous, and desensitized to be happy and comfortable when you retire? How profitable is good old Yankee ingenuity if it destroys our environment, depletes our resources, and makes our cities unlivable? The real change has come both in what one's goals ought to be and how they are to be achieved. To put it simply, students have realized that the end is here and now, the future and the present are one, and that life is in the living. As a result, the rituals students once went through to insure the good life later—while becoming tense and unhappy in the process—are being cast aside and a new approach to living is being tried.

The spectre of the Bomb haunts all Americans, especially students and aware youth. Ironically, the device that ended World War II has indirectly fostered the affluence enjoyed by the postwar generation. It is the possibility that the Bomb could be used in the expanding war in Southeast Asia which has influenced the recent nationwide student anti-war effort. Students have a very real fear concerning the Bomb, the hot-line, and America's preoccupation with "honorable" victory, regardless of cost.



The draft is another cause of students' orientation to the present. The constant threat of induction into the military at some point between the ages of 18 and 26 has a devastating effect on the minds and bodies of young men. Many go to college and remain, even if they don't want to, because it is one way of at least postponing the threat of the draft. The alternative of being drafted, or jailed if one resists, has a destructive effect on maintaining relationships that might reach into the future. Life becomes an interminable limbo, where one is neither free nor imprisoned, and can do nothing but wait.

I think the draft is one of the most destructive forces operating on young men today because it gives them feelings of helplessness and dishonesty. The few effective methods of avoiding the draft employed with increasing frequency by those who are committed to escaping conscription—such as inducing high blood pressure, deafness, extreme underweight, the feigning of drug addiction or homosexuality—humiliate young men and falsify their lives.

An increasing number of young men are risking imprisonment for resisting the draft. Pacifism and draft resistance were once considered unpatriotic and cowardly. Now, resistance is viewed by peers as a courageous act of conscience, and is accepted by many as the only alternative to killing or associating with the military. The integrity of resisting the draft is considered more important than is the possibility of damaging one's future with a felony conviction.

Rejection of the materialistic, affluent way of life characteristic of many students' parents is a sign of a changed orientation among college students. They view this way of life as empty and narrow—lacking in breadth and depth of experience. Instead, students place high value on immediacy and intensity of experience and experimentation—thus the high incidence of drug use on campuses and the search for a cosmic experience through an immediate and intensified reality. Great value is placed on living in an unencumbered, Spartan fashion. Meaning is derived from the quality of daily experiences and relationships, not from possessions.

Another aspect of this anti-materialistic ethic is that students aren't anxious to move into the traditional, socially acceptable job-house-car-wife syndrome. They won't sacrifice or plan for that way of life. They are increasingly committed to living just for today.

Related to this experience-orientation is a new freedom in sexual relationships. The tradition of deferred gratification—marital sex only—has also been replaced by a spirit of experimentation and immediacy. Students engage openly in sexual relationships, and many student couples live together. Many graduating seniors do not recognize marriage as the only avenue to intimacy or a necessary social ritual.

Another change in student attitudes is an increasing willingness to risk jail sentences and criminal records, particularly for drug use and draft resistance. From the innocuous coed smoking marijuana to the speed-freak dealer, the emphasis is on the immediate experience.



Though penalties for drug abuse are severe in most states, little thought is given to how a drug offense will appear on one's record; many students feel that job resumés and detailed records will not be a part of their future lives.

Often students drop out of school because they find their education largely irrelevant, both personally and socially. Many seniors lack plans to further their education beyond the baccalaureate because there is a surfeit of educated young people on the labor market who can't find personally satisfying jobs that utilize the education they already have. Because many students have rejected the prestige and status sought by their parents, there is no need for professional or technical degrees in order to gain respect from one's fellows and oneself. I might add that of those students who are going to graduate school, many are doing so because of a deeply felt moral and social concern for the injustices and intolerable conditions that permeate American life.

Finally, the concern voiced almost unanimously by college students about the ecological problems that are threatening the survival of the people and environment of America represents a willingness to act in the immediate present rather than to postpone action to the future. Clearly foresight is involved in ecological action, but the commitment is toward modifying present conditions because they are here and now. In essence, the future has arrived. The concern is with the quality of life and commitment isn't real until each individual is willing to make a personal sacrifice. An increasing number of young people are planning to leave urban centers and live a radically different rural life. Most of them have a feeling of helplessness and despair about the state of American society and have decided that the only way to individual sanity is to leave the mainstream and return to a simpler, more self-determined kind of existence.

These are my impressions after four weeks of intensive discussion with seniors about their thoughts and feelings regarding their lives and the world that surrounds them. It is not a pretty picture in many ways, but my personal experiences reflect a relatively accurate picture of those students who are not totally isolated. I found that these conditions, and the resulting trends in attitudes, are more thoroughly widespread and deeply felt than most parents, educators, and politicians imagine.

Kathleen Allison, 24, is a research assistant in a project studying student change and development at small liberal arts colleges.

Lovely Old Boxes Are for Lovely Old Times

SARAH CIRESE

Once upon a time an organism (it doesn't much matter whether you see it as a baby or a bug) lived in a lovely old box. It was fed a diverse menu ranging from steak to garbage, but primarily peanut butter. It gained both because of and in spite of its diet. Over the past decade it grew to such dimensions and proportions that it found the box confining. It was a long time before those who paid the grocery bill began to notice this growth. In 1964 the organism had mumbled "Out!" Very few heard what it said in their concern for silencing it. Someone studied the situation. It continued to be fed and to grow but it began to have an occasional upset tummy. Now and then it poked an appendage out tentatively but received no real help. A tiny corner of the box was enlarged but the shape and size were not significantly changed. Eventually an arm burst out and, not by accident, hit a window with a shattering blow.

"What is this monster?" "Who sired it?" "What do we do with it?"

"Shove it back in." "Lop its arms off." "Deplore it." "Starve it."

Recently the organism was handed a piece of grit it just could not digest. Its reaction has not been to vomit, to have a tantrum, or to explode. Instead it came up with a rational and logical suggestion to change the shape of its box—to make the box fit the needs of the organism it houses and to open up the sides to promote interchange with its environment.

"But it won't be a box anymore."

Whatever the shape, those who favor this change hold that it will be a far more appropriate home than the old box. Lovely old boxes are for lovely old times.

Sarah Cirese, 30, Assistant Specialist in Psychology, is Co-director of a study of differential education and student development of exceptional and creative students in different college environments.

